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EDITORIAL

For whom are the English courses of high school and college planned? To whom are they in fact suited, to the specialist in literary and linguistic study or to the ordinary citizen? The question grows in pertinence with the rise in the number of students attending the secondary schools and the higher institutions, yet there seems to be little discussion of it. Are we to assume either that the same instruction is adapted to both specialists and ordinary students or that the adaptation has already been made?

Neither assumption is correct. The English course as we have it is primarily a course for specialists or is justified, so far as it can be justified, by the arguments in support of the theory of general mental discipline. Without denying the possibility of a certain amount of relatively general training to be obtained from the study of language or of literature, one may, nevertheless, affirm that little or no conscious effort is made in most English classes to provide the conditions favorable to the transfer of abilities which may be cultivated there to other situations, either near or remote. Transfer is taken for granted. All the evidence goes to show, however, that unless special provision is made for it, the carrying over of power gained in one situation to other differing situations is slight.

As for the courses given, they embody, with notable exceptions, mainly the interests of the instructor himself, a person who is supposed to be, and very often is, completely absorbed in his chosen work. Suppose the members of the class in every case were known to be leaving school at the end of the term, what then? And suppose the use to which their experiences in English study will actually be put were the determining factor in choice of subject and of method, would the work proceed just as it now does?

As a matter of fact this is not the common assumption. On the contrary far too many teachers of English—possibly a majority—

regard their province as that of preparing their students for their next step, *as students*, forgetting how small a fraction of the class will become professional workers in this field, that most of them will enter quite other walks of life. The whole affair is conceived too largely from an intramural point of view. As matters stand, teaching or the graduate school of research provides the only adequate opportunity for the use of much of the terminology and technique supposed to be acquired. Teaching and study to make more teachers and students to do more teaching and so on—such appears to be the present sequence.

The evil admits of a remedy. If the point of reference in the laying out of the regular courses in English should become the life of the ordinary person of intelligence, first, as he lives it now at fifteen or twenty and, second, as he is about to live it as a citizen and a householder, instead of the traditional equipment for higher studies, there would be a noticeable shifting of emphasis both in aims and in methods. This would result in economy to all concerned. Specialists would be better provided for in courses devised solely for them, where they would be less hampered by classmates not fitted by temper or attainment to do the work demanded. Students in general would find it necessary to undertake fewer courses in order to obtain that acquaintance with books and command of oral and written style suited to everyday needs. And the public would not be called upon to pay the bill for so much technical instruction wide of the mark. That instructors themselves would be better satisfied with the results of their work and that there might be more adequately trained teachers is evident.